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THESIS

THE PLACE OF THE SCRIPTURES IN AUGUSTINE'S CONVERSION

Submitted by

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INTRODUCTION

The first sentence in the Confessions of Augustine is a sentence from the Psalms:

> Great art Thou, O Lord, and greatly to be praised; great is Thy power, and Thy wisdom is infinite.[1]

Since the writings of Augustine contain so many references to the Scriptures, it is very appropriate that he should introduce a portion of the Scriptures as the first sentence in that revelation of human character as we find it in the Confessions.

It should be a fascinating study to trace the influences of the Scripture in the conversion of this man who quoted so volubly from them.

INTRODUCTION

To one who has read the story of his conversion casually, this influence would be ascribed to the one verse in Romans that helped him to make his decision, namely: Romans 13:14. In this study, however, we would do more than simply view the drame from the seat of the spectator; we would like to go behind the scenes and see, if possible, how the different parts of the story are interwoven in the plot. This process, we hope, will not destroy for us the beauty of the story. as we see it in its entirety, but rather intensify the influence that the Scriptures played in the life of

1. Confessions, Book I, Sec.1.

Augustine, and give a new appreciation of the place that the Scriptures should occupy in human life of today. This, I hope, is well within the realm of history.

Beneath every great movement or change in human life, there are quiet forces at work that are not apparent to the superficial observer. William James says:

> The phenomenon of conversion is partly due to explicitly conscious processes of thought and will, but as due largely also to the subconscious incubation and maturing of motives deposited by the experiences of life. When ripe, the results hatch out, or burst into flower.[1]

To have a more correct estimate of the place that the Scriptures had in his conversion, we must do more than simply consider the direct and conscious influence at the time of his conversion, but rather include a study of his early life, and endeavor to see the steps of progress in the evolution of the Scriptures in his development. This is well nigh impossible at some places in his life, for the traces of the Scriptural influences at times are not evident, but where it is possible, we shall endeavor to follow the influences and arrive at the final scene.

So, with our eyes and minds alert, let us follow the trail, as we go through the Confessions, the Soliloquies, and the other sources that will aid us in our search.

1. James, William, Varieties of Religious Experience, P.212.

THE INFLUENCE OF THE SCRIPTURES IN AUGUSTINE'S EARLY LIFE.

It is not possible to make absolute statements in regard to the Scriptures that were taught to Augustine in his childhood. Some phrases, no doubt, would stand out in his memory and would be recalled again and again in his writings and addresses, while others would be forgotten even though their influence upon his life were not lost.

AS EFFECTIVELY BROUGHT TO AUGUSTINE'S ATTENTION BY HIS MOTHER.

As Augustine gives us his recollection of his youth in the Confessions, we would keep in mind that he was unable to recall the full impact of the Scriptures upon his life, and, therefore, we should make due allowances for that which has escaped his attention, and also remember he is no longer the boy who played in Thagaste, at the time when the Confessions were written. There is sufficient evidence for us to state that the Scriptures were effectively brought to Augustine's attention.

Augustine's mother, Monnica, was a devout christian. Since she had found her great joy in Christ, it is only natural that she greatly desired her son to be a follower of Christ. "Augustine was early pointed to Christ by Monnica," says William Shedd.[1] Dr. Adolph Harnack asserts that the name of Christ was ineffacibly

1. Shedd, William, Augustine's Confessions, Preface, P. xxxiv.

imprinted upon Augustine from the time of his childhood.[1] It was her great concern that Augustine would become a Christian in the true sense of the term. Her reluctance in having him baptized was due entirely to her high conception of that sacrament. The one and only reason that she hesitated in allowing the sacrament to be given, was that she was afraid that her son would not be able to be restrained from sin and that such sin committed after the sacrament was administered was very much more grievous that the sin committed before the "washing away of sins." Augustine expresses this thought in the following:

> Whereupon the mother of my flesh, being much troubled, (since, with a heart pure in Thy faith, she even more lovingly travailed in birth of my salvation), would in eager haste have provided for my consecration and cleansing by the healing sacrament, confessing Thee, Lord Jesus, for the remission of sins, unless I had suddenly recovered.[2]

With the exception of the baptism, it may be said that Monnica left nothing undone, which she was able to provide, that would make the Scriptures more regnant in his life. We have reasons to believe that she spared no pains in presenting the life of Christ to Augustine. Augustine says:

> As a boy, then, I had already heard of an eternal life, promised to us

1. Harnack, Confessions of Augustine, P.139
2. The Confessions, Book I, Sec. XI.

> through the humility of the Lord, our God stooping to our pride; and even from the womb of my mother, who greatly hoped in Thee, I was sealed with the mark of His cross and salted with His salt.[1]

Note that this was a rite in the Western Churches, on admission as a catechumen, previous to baptism, denoting the purity and uncorruptedness and discretion required of Christians. Thus we see that Monnica went as far as she felt she dare go, in bringing Augustine under the influence of Christ.

HIS DESIRE OF BAPTISM DURING ILLNESS

Augustine's desire for baptism during his illness, indicates that Monnica's efforts in teaching him the Scriptures were not without their results. It might be said that the importance attached to baptism was due to the emphasis that the church laid upon it. Nevertheless, it is the influence of the Scriptures and the teachings concerning baptism that made the impress upon the boy's mind. Too much cannot be said about the importance of teaching the Scriptures to children. What a child learns in his early life, is like the seed sown in the soil and allowed to have rootage before the counter influences make themselves felt in the life of the child and retard his spiritual development. He, of his own accord, desired to be baptized

1. Confessions: Book I, Sec.XI.

during the time of his illness. It was not merely a childish whim on his part, as we can readily see from the following:

> Thou sawest, my God, (for Thou wert my keeper), with what eagerness and what faith I sought, from the pious care of my mother and Thy church, the mother of us all, the baptism of Thy Christ, my God and Lord.[1]

We can almost feel the gravity of the situation, as the words of Mark 16:16 came to his mind: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be comdemned."[2] He assures us that he then already believed.

VALUE OF PRAYER IN HIS BOYHOOD.

This belief is manifested in his practice of prayer when he was still a boy. One may doubt the ethics of utilizing prayer as a means of escaping punishment when at school, but nevertheless, Augustine thought that he would give it a trial. His belief in God as one who would help him, prompted him,

> to call on Thee, praying Thee, though small yet with no small earnestness, that I might not be beaten at school. And when Thou heardest me not, (not thereby giving me over to folly) my elders, yea even my parents, who yet wished me no ill, mocked my stripes, my then great and grievous ill.[3]

His experience was different from that of Robertson of

1. Confessions, Book I, Sec.XI.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid. Book I, Sec.IX

Brighton, the great English preacher, who,when taken up with nine other boys at school, to be unjustly punished, prayed to escape the shame. The master, previously to flogging all the others, said to him: "Little boy, I excuse you. I have particular reasons for it."[1]

Without a doubt this experience of prayer was very vital to Augustine at that time, and a little sympathy and attention from his parents might have been instrumental in saving him from the dangers of doubt that he encountered later in his life. It is sufficient for us to know that at this time there was evidence of a vital faith in the Scriptures. This faith is due very largely to the tireless efforts of his mother. He says himself that he kept within his soul the echo of the name of Jesus Christ which he so often heard her pronounce. It is like those melodies that bring back to one whole phases of the past life. Perhaps, whenever that sacred name came to his attention, it recalled to him his mother's piety and the God of his infancy.

It was fortunate that Monnica brought the Scriptures so effectively to Augustine's attention in his early life, for he must needs be fortified to meet the conditions that faced him in Thagaste and Madaura.

Thagaste was by no means an ideal town in

1. Fosdick The Meaning of Prayer, P.29

which to rear a boy according to the teachings of the Scriptures. Bertrand ascribes its importance to the fact that the town was the half-way stopping place of the southern coast towns. It was the junction of many Roman roads, and the Imperial mail halted before the inn of the town. Since the neighboring towns were smaller in size, Thagaste would be considered a fair sized town by the citizens. In brief, it was a town where the forces of vice and sin would likely abound. Professor Marlatt pictures the conditions at Thagaste as follows:

BAD ENVIRONMENT AT THAGASTE AND MADAURA

> With such an environment Augustine's boyish mind was an unfertile field for spirituality. In fact, it was almost as barren of religious impulses as the desert beyond the 'palm-fringe' ... Everything around him fed his instinctive passion for carnal beauty and carnal pleasure. At Thagaste men were praised, when in rich and adorned and well-ordered discourse, they related their own disordered life, and, being praised, they gloried.[1]

With sensuality around him, and the Hellenistic influences abounding, Augustine would indeed have a hard time to follow the path that his mother would have him tread. It is, therefore, not strange that she was desirous of having the baptism postponed.

In the time of Augustine, religious and secular education were not as sharply differentiated

1. Marlatt, Earl Protestant Saints, P.7

as they are today. A religion was taught in the schools but this religion was far different from that which his mother was teaching him. The tales of the gods as they were presented in the schools were very interesting to Augustine. In fact so interesting were these tales that the teachings about Christ and God which he had received from his mother tended to be relegated to the background. A youth of Augustine's temperament would naturally be attracted to the interesting and colorful accounts of the gods. He must be driven at times to learn "one and one, two; two and two, four" but he was glad enough to read about the wanderings of Aeneas. He tells us that he was considerably moved by the account of the death of Dido. "'The wooden horse lined with armed men,'and 'the burning of Troy,' and 'Creusa's shade and sad similitude,' were the choice spectacle of my vanity."[1]

PAGAN INFLUENCES OF THE SCHOOLS

If the pupil was averse to study about these and other tales, the teachers were liable to apply the stick. In commenting upon these tales, Augustine says that it is well to learn the words for these in themselves were "choice and precious vessels," but he denounced the error which was conveyed through the use of words with which the teachers themselves were "intoxicated. "And if we, too, drink not, we are beaten, and

1. Confessions. Book I, Sec.XIII

have no sober judge to whom we may appeal."[1] The gods were portrayed as sensual, lustful beings who would stoop to acts that today would be considered highly immoral. Tales such as those would possibly have the same effect that the novels of the baser sort that are published today, have upon the lovelorn youth of today. Augustine, who was of a passionate nature, would be more interested because of the sensational details. His denunciation is the more severe because of the great attraction that they once had for him. Having once yielded to their influences he now hates these tales.

> Did I not read in thee of Job the thunderer and the adulterer?... And now which of our gowned masters lends a sober ear to one who from their own school cries out, 'These were Homer's fictions, transferring things human to the gods; would he had brought down things divine to us!'"[2]

The emphasis was laid upon literary correctness rather than upon correctness in morals. The rules of letters were very carefully observed and if these were violated, the crime seemingly was greater than of the person had been guilty of a penal offense. Thus, an orator addressing a great throng, would be more careful that he would not, through a mistake of tongue, murder the word, "human being," than he would be, in his fury, to murder a real human being.[3]

1. Confessions. Book I Sec.XVI
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid. Book I Sec XVIII.

The results of such teaching is seen in the conduct of Augustine. He lied to his tutors and parents. He stole, not merely because of greediness or of necessity, but because he considered it in the light of an achievement. In fact, he applied the morals learned at school, which, under the Christian plane, would be classifed as being distinctly immoral. Thus, the Scriptures were pitted against the teaching in the school and the preponderance seemed to be on the side of the pagans.

UNWHOLESOME INFLUENCE OF COMPANIONS

The influence of the companions with whom Augustine played was a decided liability. Against this influence, the Scriptures, as they were taught by Monnica, would have difficulty in restraining the wayward steps of the youth. It should be said that this influence was not always wielded upon Augustine. He was not the kind to sit back and let the other fellow do it. More frequently than not, he abetted the achievements of the gang, and his active mind planned new conquests. He endeavored arduously to out-do the best of them, and if he were lacking in deeds, he could readily supplement his achievement by a ready tongue and a fertile imagination.[1]

It was the influence of the gang spirit, that promoted many of these escapades. "Yet I had not done this alone; alone I never would have done it...Let's

[1]. Confessions, Book I, Sec. XVIII

go, let's do it, we are ashamed not to be shameless."[1] So, even though Augustine himself was responsible for many of the evils that were committed under the guise of play, the companionship of the boys in his home town was an influence against which the Scriptures were pitted.

Augustine's companionship with the opposite sex had far greater consequences than the escapades with the boys. And yet , he may have been encouraged to start upon a life licentiousness because of his contact with the boys. Evidently the tales of the gods and their lewd lives have made such an impression upon the mind of Augustine that he soon is overcome by the power of concupiscence. "I was tossed about, and wasted, and dissipated, and I boiled over in my fornication."[2] Augustine says little about Madaura where he went to study grammar and rhetoric. It is reasonable to suppose that he learned more than simply grammar and rhetoric in this heathen town, for it is at this time that he is much involved in the struggle against dissipation. The year following his studies there, is a year of idleness at Thagaste where he wallowed deeper and deeper in the vice of immorality. When his father learns about his physical state he is glad rather than sorry for he is looking forward toward having grandchildren. Patricius is an indulgent father. He does all he can to provide for Augustine's education. He has high hopes as far as this is concerned,

1. Confessions, Book II, Sec. IX.
2. Ibid. Book II, Sec. I.

but he cares little what Augustine's moral development may be.

Augustine observes that other parents who were financially more able than his parents to provide for the education of their children, failed to do so. While he appreciated their sacrifices, he wishes, as he looks back upon those years, that his father had been more solicitous about his moral condition.

> But yet this same father had no concern how I grew towards Thee, or how chaste I were; so that I were but copious in speech, however barren I were to Thy culture, O God, who are the only true and good Lord of Thy field, my heart.[1]

His mother, on the other hand, did all that she could to help him. The moment she hears about his sin, she prevails upon him to restrain himself. Her words at that time did not seem to have much effect upon him. He rushes headlong, unable, and alas, unwilling to contain himself.

> I was ashamed of a less shamelessness among my equals, when I heard them boast of their flagitiousness, yea the more boasting, the more they were degraded; and I took pleasure, not only in the pleasure of the deed, but in the praise.[2]

The year of idleness at the home of his parents, after Augustine had returned from Madaura, was anything but helpful. Parental discipline was lax and he "walked the

1. Confessions, Book II, Sec. III.
2. Ibid.

streets of Babylon, and wallowed in the mire thereof, as if in a bed of spices and precious ointments."[1] Here his sensuous nature had the ascendancy. As Augustine in his later years reviews this period of his life, he regrets that his parents did not keep him from ruin by permitting him to marry. The question arises whether any moral influence would have restrained these dissolute fellows at this time. Their entire outlook on life was wrong. It would be difficult at this period to evaluate the influence of the Scriptures upon Augustine, for it seemed as though he had sold himself entirely to sin and vice. Yet in all this time Monnica would not release her hold upon her son. She was willing that he should continue his education, for she thought that this would not only be no hindrance, but that it might be a means of bringing him nearer to God.[2]

THE ENVIRONMENT AT CARTHAGE

When Augustine leaves his home in Thagaste to come to Carthage he finds conditions even worse. "To Carthage, I came," said he, "where there sang all around me in my ears a caldron of unholy loves."[3] Here the parental influence was removed and the evils of Carthage had their day in Augustine's life. His sensuous nature found expression in an illicit relation which he contracted. It must be

1. Confessions, Book III, Sec. III.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid. Book IV, Sec. I.

said in justice to Augustine that he remained true to this woman who was his concubine; and that in his day this action of living in conjugal relationships without actually being married was not considered in the same light as it would be today. He, however, is not very charitable as he views this part of his life;

> I defiled, therefore, the spring of friendship with the filth of concupiscence, and I beclouded its brightness with the hell of lustfulness.[1]

In Carthage, the stage-plays captivated him. He found pleasure in giving expression to the emotions that were aroused by the action on the stage. This, too, according to his mature judgment is folly, since the spectator is not called on "to relieve, but only to grieve."[2]

Despite the reputation which Carthage had as a city of vice and sin, Augustine's life there was not as wanton as it was in Thagaste. He at least was free from the influence of his companions, with whom at Thagaste he was incited to commit many gross sins. While he no doubt had companions in Carthage, yet here the spirit of the gang was not as it had been in his home town. Nevertheless, his life continued to be checkered with "unholy loves." His passionate and affectionate nature demanded expression. Rose E. Cleveland in the Preface

1. Confessions, Book III, Sec. I.
2. Confessions, Book III, Sec. II.

to the Soliloquies describes Augustine's youth and boyhood, as;

> A record of excessive antagonisms and excessive predilections, of passionate joys and passionate sorrows; such as a nature at once fiery and tender must experience amid the 'contrary currents of the world.'[1]

Through the maze of sin brought about by the unwholesome conditions in Augustine's early life, the influence of the Scriptures is not easily discernible.

RESULT OF THESE INFLUENCES

It was as though the seed were sown in thorny ground, and had little chance to develop. The wonder is, not that the Scriptures had so little an influence in Augustine's life but that these influences persisted at all. It is to be remembered, however, that the Confessions represent an episcopal perspective of these early days, and that the guilt is accentuated as Augustine views these failings from the spiritual height to which he had risen.

To judge the influence of the Scriptures in his early life, we should consider what his life would have been and to what depths he would have fallen had he not been brought in contact with the Scriptures. There are two forces at work: the one, personified by the evil influences that beclouded his life and enticed him to all manner of excesses; the other, the Scriptures, as

1. Cleveland, Rose: Soliloquies, Preface P.xxviii

they were brought to his attention by his mother, and as they found expression through her life. It is very difficult to evaluate the influence of the Scriptures at this period of Augustine's life. The "Word" or the seed, as it is sometimes termed, is in the embryo stage. On the surface, nothing may be in evidence, and Augustine may even scoff at them; yet under the surface, in the realm of the subconscious, there is a growth, there is an influence which will eventually bear fruit.

THE INTER-PLAY OF FACTORS WITH THE SCRIPTURES IN AUGUSTINE'S QUEST FOR TRUTH

Augustine's sensual nature, great as it was, finally gave way to the intellectual. Were it not for the mental attainments and the desire for knowledge, that were prevalent in Augustine, possibly the intense physical desires would have entirely undermined this life which was destined to become a great power in the Church.

CICERO'S HORTENSIUS AND THE SCRIPTURES

The wild life at Carthage, much as it must have attracted Augustine, partially loses its charm after he, in the course of his studies, finds a certain book written by Cicero. He is first attracted to this book because of its style and then is captivated by its subject matter. This book, the Hortensius (an exhortation to philosophy) had such an influence upon him, that it altered his affections.

> Every vain hope at once became worthless to me; and I longed with an incredibly burning desire for an immortality of wisdom.[1]

The book must have had a profound influence upon him for he claims that it quite inflamed him with a love for wisdom. It was possibly better fitted than any other instrument to turn his mind from things sensual to philosophy. As a teacher of rhetoric Augustine obviously would be attracted by the ornate style with which the

1. Confessions, Book III, Sec. IV

Hortensius was written, and before he was aware of it his mind became absorbed in the ideas of truth which the book contained. Thus, the Hortensius presented the truth to this sophisticated young man in such a form as would be most appealing to him.

Augustine attributes to Cicero's Hortensius, the credit for his awakened interest in the Scriptures.

> It altered my affections and turned my prayers to Thyself, O Lord; and made me have other purposes and desires.[1]

At this time, according to his statement, he had not yet come in contact with the Apostolic Scriptures. His quest for truth would inevitably lead him to the Scriptures,and especially would this be true in his case, since the Scriptures were so ineffacibly impressed upon him in his childhood. Note how this early influence of the Scriptures persists in his consciousness, as it is revealed in the following:

> And since at that time (Thou O thou light of my heart knowest) Apostolic Scripture was not known to me, I was delighted with that exhortation, so far only, that I was strongly roused, and kindled, and inflamed to love, and seek, and obtain, and hold, and embrace not this or that sect, but wisdom itself whatever it were; and this alone checked me thus enkindled, that the name of Christ was not in it. For this name, according to

[1]. Confessions, Book III, Sec. VII.

> thy mercy O Lord, this name of my Saviour Thy Son, had my tender heart, even with my mother's milk, devoutly drunk in, and deeply treasured; and whatsoever was without that name, though never so learned, polished, or true, took not entire hold of me.[1]

Unknowingly, Augustine judged these ideas that were brought to him from these various sources by the standard of the Scriptures which were impressed upon him by his mother. I think that the statement quoted above pays a very high tribute to the mother who took her task seriously and did what she could to give her son a thorough religious education.

Realizing the limitations of the Hortensius, Augustine turns to the Scriptures. "I resolved thereupon," said he, "to bend my studies towards the Holy Scriptures, that I might see what they were."[2] Bertrand comments as follows: "But to go to the Bible by way of Cicero was to take the wrong road."[3]

As he reads the Scriptures, he is very much disappointed. There is such a great difference in the style. "They seemed to me far unworthy to be compared to the **stateliness** of the Ciceronian eloquence."[4] Osmun makes this observation:

> If it is true that he read the earliest Latin translation which

1. Confessions, Book III, Sec. IV
2. Ibid. Book III, Sec. V.
3. Bertrand, Saint Augustin, P. 102
4. Confessions, Book III, Sec. V.

> had been used in Africa from the days of Tertullian, we can understand somewhat the repulsion he felt at its rude even barbarous style...'unworthy to be compared with the dignity of Tully'[1]

Augustine's reaction to Hortensius shows that the seed of the "Word" still has the spark of life, but conditions are still unfavorable for its growth. "Being swollen with pride," he was not in such an attitude of mind and heart whereby he would be able to find the truth for which he is now seeking. This period of his life is very well summed up in the following:

> The perusal of Cicero's Hortensius purified and developed in Augustine, the love of truth whilst it spoke to him in beautiful language of God and immortality. At that period, the study of the Scriptures produced no impression upon him. The simplicity and occasional ruggedness of the style offended him.[2]

Notwithstanding the unfavorable impression which the Scriptures made when compared with the elegant style of Cicero, Augustine realizes that there is something beyond, and in seeking that "something" he will eventually be led to the Scriptures. Thus the Hortentius was instrumental in inflaming him with the desire for the truth and because of this it should be considered as one of the factors that pointed him to

1. Osmun, Augustine the Thinker, p. 31
2. Smith, Dictionary of Christian Biography, Vol.I P.16

the freedom that he finally was able to achieve from the bondage of the flesh.

Since Augustine placed so much emphasis on the name of Christ, he fell an easy victim to the wiles of the Manichees,

> in whose mouths were the snares of the Devil, lined with the mixture of the syllables of Thy name, and of our Lord Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Ghost, the Paraclete, our Comforter.[1]

Moreover, this sect promised a solution to the problem of evil that was troubling Augustine at this period. Harnack states that Manichaeism is the most artistic and richest philosophic attempt to disentangle the knotty problems of the origin and meaning of evil.[2] It was their apparent solution to this question that led Augustine to become a Manichaen. Being asked, "'Tell me whence we do evil?' Augustine replies, 'You start a question, which when rather young, greatly harassed me, and drove and cast me headlong and worn among the heretics.'"[3] Harnack claims that Augustine became a Manichaen because he did not get past the idea that the Catholic doctrine held God to be the originator of sin.[4] It seems rather doubtful, that he should be greatly troubled with the idea of sin at this stage. Nevertheless, it had

MANICHAEISM VERSUS THE SCRIPTURES

1. Confessions, Book III Sec.VI.
2. Harnack, Encyclopedia Brittanica, Vol.I,II, p.908
3. Confessions, Footnote in Everyman's Edition, P.40
4. Ibid, Footnote, p.37

some influence in directing his attention to the Manichees.

It seems more reasonable to suppose that Augustine was more attracted to the Manichees because of the emphasis they placed upon reason. This is very evident from the following:

> In his preface to the book, On the Benefits of Believing, Augustine writing to Honoratus who at that time was still among the Manichees, says, 'Thou knowest, Honoratus, that the circumstances which led me amongst those men, was their profession, that setting aside the terrors of authority they would lead such as would listen to them, to God by the plain and simple way of reason, and would rescue them from all errors. For what else led me for nearly nine years, despising the religion which was in my boyhood ingrafted into me by my parents to follow and be a diligent hearer of those men, but that they alleged that we were terrified by superstition, and that faith was enjoined to us before reason, while they urged no one to believe until the truth had been sifted and cleared![1]

It is obvious that at this period of Augustine's life, such a theory would greatly appeal to him. His ability to master Aristotle's Ten Predicaments, gave him an air of superiority and in this sophisticated spirit he would easily fall prey to these theories. The simple style of the Scriptures and their emphasis upon faith, would scarcely appeal to him now that he has experienced

1. Confessions, Everyman's Edition, P.37, Note I.

the latent power of reason. In his mature years, as he looks back upon these days, he admits that it would have been better for him to have been of slower wit and to have remained in "the nest of Thy church," but now with the air of a sophist he would press out into the unknown with only the lamp of reason to guide him. So at first he disregarded many of the tenets that formerly had guided him in his quest for "Truth," not realizing that this "ungodly pride" would make him blind to the real truth. Thus, Manichaeism, by setting up reason as the chief test for truth, and overemphasizing it, was instrumental in hiding the deeper truth from his mind. Augustine, however, pressed forward with the fresh ardor of one who was thrilled with the discovery of truth and became a very zealous Manichaen.

His mother was very much concerned when she learned that he had abandoned his former faith in the Scriptures to take up Manichaeism. In her characteristic way, she tried to restrain him, but Augustine was not in the mood to take her admonitions seriously. On one occasion, she tells him of a vision she had had. In this dream, she saw herself standing on a certain wooden rule, and a shining youth coming towards her, who inquired concerning her grief. When she told him that she was grieving about her son, this youth told her to rest contented

and to look and observe. She looked and saw her son standing on the same rule. As she told Augustine of this vision, he interpreted it to mean that before long she would be as he was; namely,a Manichaen. Monnica, however, insisted that he was the one who would change and be as she was.[1]

Augustine's interest in Manichaeism led him to consult astrologers and mathematicians. He is not a little impressed with the manner in which they are able to foretellthe future. He notices that they do not seem to use sacrifice, nor to pray to any spirit; and he is, perhaps, all the more impressed that they do not do these things. As he was speaking one day, Vindicianus, a wise old man who is skillful in physics hears him. From the address, the old gentleman discovers that Augustine was very much interested in divinations. He tells Augustine to put them away as he recounts how he, in his younger days, was thinking of taking up this work as a profession byt that he soon discovered that there was not much truth in it. Augustine, loath to give the matter up, asks that, if this were simply a vain philosophy, why it was that so frequently things were foretold correctly? Vindicianus replied that, according to the law of chance, these men would be correct in their predictions in some instances.

1. Confessions, Book III, Sec.XI.

Evaluating this influence of Vindicianus, Augustine says: "And thus much, either from or through him, Thou conveyedst to me, and tracedst in my memory, what I might hereafter examine for myself."[1] To this influence should also be reckoned the efforts of Nebridius, a dear friend of Augustine, who frequently derided the entire theory of divinations, as he speaks with Augustine.

Augustine's experience with a friend did much to open his eyes to the folly of the Manichaes. He is very eager to win this friend over the the Manichees, and so he speaks to him incessantly about it, scarcely allowing him any peace, even during the time when this friend was ill. This friend, in his illness, can not bear to hear the tales that the Manichees have concocted, and will not suffer Augustine to speak to him about them. The latter refrains until this friend will have recovered, but ere long this young man, who was very dear to Augustine, dies, still holding to his former views.

While this friend may have failed to hold his own in the arguments with Augustine, and thus failed in a measure to wield much influence upon him, yet at his death, Manichaeism received a serious set-back, as far as Augustine was concerned. It may be said that from

1. Confessions, Book IV, Sec.III

that time on, Augustine became somewhat sceptical concerning Manichaeism. In his great sorrow for his friend he endeavors to fin that which endures. Friends may succeed other friends, and yet death may rob him of these also. It eventually leads him to see that he should love his friend in God. He realizes that the senses of the flesh are not sufficient in themselves, for they do not go far enough. He discovers that there are limitations to the sense world, and that perhaps even reason does not go far enough. "For in Thy Word, by which they are created, they hear their decree,'hence and hitherto.'"[1] In the moments of sorrow he finds that there is possibly more to the Scriptures than he may have thought before. It may seem right and good to subject the "Word" to reason and put aside anything which does not seem reasonable, but when one faces the stern realities of life and death, reason in itself does not give very much comfort, and the man-made theories are liable to break down under the test. In times like these, one may hear as did Augustine, that:

> The Word itself calleth thee to return: and there is the place of rest imperturbable, where love is not forsaken, if itself forsaketh not....But do I depart any whither? saith the Word of God. There fix thy dwelling, trust there whatsoever thou hast thence, O my soul, at least now thou art tired

1. Confessions, Book IV, Sec.X

> out with vanities. Entrust Truth, whatsoever thou hast from truth and thou shalt lose nothing.[1]

Augustine realizes more and more that there is little truth among the Manichees, when he puts their theories to a thorough scrutiny. They are not able to answer his questions, and to remove his difficulties, as they had boasted they would. Augustine is referred to a certain man named Faustus who is famous for his eloquence and his ability. Augustine looks forward to the coming of this man with much anticipation. When Faustus finally arrives, Augustine finds him to be very fluent and an eloquent speaker, a very agreeable man who is able to convince many people to the truth as he believes it to be. Augustine, however, demands more at this time than simply eloquence, He was versed in the teachings of the Manichees, and he is looking for additional light. Moreover, Augustine was accustomed to think for himself and had the disposition to ask questions about the matters if they were not made clear to his mind. In other words, he subjected Manichaeism to the same vigorous scrutiny to which he had subjected the Scriptures.

Faustus was ignorant concerning the liberal sciences with the exception of grammar. His power and eloquence were largely due to his reading Tully's orations

1. Confessions, Book IV, Sec.XI

and some of the books of Seneca. Faustus was very affable but was unable to give any light on the problems which were troubling Augustine. After hearing what Faustus had to say, Augustine makes the following comment:

> Thou, O my God, hadst already taught me by wonderful and secret ways, and therefore I believe that Thou taughtest me because it is truth, nor is there besides Thee any teacher of truth, where or whencesoever it may shine upon us.[1]

Formerly Augustine believed that what the Manichees had criticized in the Scriptures, could not be defended. Now, he wished that he had conferred with some one who was skilled in these books, such as Helpidius, who when he spoke in Carthage, on one occasion, produced things out of the Scriptures not easily withstood. The Manichees endeavored to answer it but not to Augustine's satisfaction, and this answer, by the way was given privately. This, according to Augustine, was the answer:

> That the Scriptures of the New Testament had been corrupted by I know not whom, who wished to engraff the laws of the Jews upon the Christian faith: yet themselves produced not anycorrupted copies.[2]

Was this the sect which held forth the possibility of a gradual unfolding of a secret wisdom, and the final disappearance of all barriers to the truth!! It was very evident to Augustine, that he would have to look

1. Confessions, Book V, Sec.VI.
2. Ibid. Sec.XI.

elsewhere for the truth which he sought.

Though Augustine bitterly repents of these nine years as wasted, I am not so certain but that these years were very valuable and formed an important part in his development. These nine years might be compared to the period of darkness preceding the dawn. In Hortensius Augustine caught a glimmer of the truth and his main attention was centered in the quest for truth, even though in his private life, he was still under the thraldom of sensuality. In this quest for truth, he went to the Scriptures but is disappointed there,because of the simplicity of the style, and the other problems which it raised, so that he turned to the Manichees who promised that he would find the solution to his problems, only to find that the "Truth, Truth," about which they spoke so much, was not in them.

Yet, even though we would take at its face value, the statement, "Manichaeism left him in complete doubt as to the foundations and truth of the Christian Faith,"[1] not all was lost, nor were these years wasted. The periods of doubt and apparent unbelief are not to be disregarded --- they are like the storms which literally strengthen the sinews of faith, and through the darkness, the "Light of the Word" becomes more apparent by contrast.

1. Harnakk, History of Dogma, Vol.V, P.79
Reuter, L.C.P., 490f.

I like to think that in this period the Scriptures were growing in importance in the under-strata of Augustine's life; and while unknown to him at the time, they became more and more firmly established in his mind because of these nine years of apparently fruitless search after truth.

Having despaired in finding the truth among the Manichees, Augustine leaned toward scepticism.

PLATONIC PHILOSOPHY AND THE SCRIPTURES

After his experience with these who were so positive about the truth, he was not so sure but that the Academics were wiser than the rest, when they held that men ought to doubt everything and that no truth could be comprehended by men.[1] Augustine voices this doubt in the Confessions:

> Doubt, then, what to hold for certain, the more sharply gnawed my heart, the more ashamed I was, that so long deluded and deceived by the promise of certainties, I had with childish error and vehemence prated of so many uncertainties.[2]

Augustine was first snatched from this night of uncertainty by NeoPlatonism. He is saved from scepticism by perceiving that even if the whole of the external world was subject to doubt, the facts of the inner life remained, and demanded an explanation leading

1. Confessions. Book V, Sec.X
2. Ibid. Sec.IV

to certainty.[1] As he reads Plato, Augustine learns that a reality could exist without being apparent to the senses.

> Plato believed that there were two worlds; one spiritual, in which truth itself dwelt; the other, this world of ours, which is tangible to sense.[2]

As Augustine came in contact with this theory it would clear up his confusion to some extent. He says:

> And because, when I wish to think of God, I knew not what to think of, but a mass of bodies (for what was not such did not seem to me to be anything) this was the greatest, and almost only cause of my inevitable error.[3]

Thus the Platonic philosophy served to bridge the chasm between scepticism where Manichaeism had left him, and the belief in the spiritual life. It enabled him to think in the realm of the spirit as well as in the realm of the senses.

As certain books of the Platonists that were translated from Greek into Latin, come into his hands, Augustine is surprised to see the remarkable likeness between them and the Gospel of Saint John.

> And therein I read, not indeed in the very words, but to the very same purpose, enforced by many and diverse reasons that 'In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God.'[4]

Thus he discovered in the Platonic dialogue many of the

1. Harnack, History of Dogma, Vol.V P.110
2. Confessions, Book IV, Sec.X Note.
3. Ibid, Book V, Sec.X
4. Ibid, Book VII, Sec.IX.

essential parts of the doctrine of Christ, and again his attention was turned to the Scriptures. Not only does he find an increased interest in the Scriptures, but new light is brought to him on the question of evil. He is led to see that iniquity was not inherent in substance but rather in the perversion of the will that misused this substance, and turned away from God to the lower things of life.

Augustine is still sophisticated and "prated as one well skilled; but had I not sought Thy way in Christ our Saviour, I had proved to be, not skilled but killed."[1] He believed that he was providentially led to these books of the Platonists and claims that it was fortunate that he chanced to come upon them before he made a thorough study of the Scriptures. His own description of inter-relations is enlightening to our discussion at this point:

> Upon these, I believe, Thou therefore willedst that I should fall, before I studied Thy Scriptures, that it might be imprinted on my menory, how I was affected by them; and that afterwards when my spirits were tamed through Thy books, and my wounds touched by Thy healing fingers, I might discern and distinguish between preseumption and confession between those who saw whither they were to go, yet saw not the way, and the way that leadeth not to behold only but to dwell in the beatific

1. Confessions, Book VII, Sec.XX

> country. For Had I first been formed in Thy Holy Scriptures, and hadst Thou in the familiar use of them, grown sweet unto me, and had I then fallen upon those other volumes, they might perhaps have withdrawn me from the solid ground of piety, or, had I continued in that healthful frame from which I had thence imbibed, I might have thought, that it might have been obtained by the study of these books alone.[1]

While Platonism made a great contribution to the life of Augustine, in that it helped to remove him from scepticism, and direct his attention to the Scriptures, yet he found that in these writings, attractive as they were to him, some things were lacking. The pages of Plato do not contain the ideals of piety and humility.[2] In this human system he is unable to find that which is of prime importance to him, namely peace with conscience and with God, and the renovating power that is a requisite to a holy life. He says:

> For it is one thing from the mountain's shaggy height to see the land of peace, and to find no way thither; and in vain to essay through ways unpassable, opposed and beset by fugitives and deserters, under their captain, the lion, and the dragon; and another to keep on the way that leads thither, guarded by the host of the heavenly General.[3]

To the Scriptures, therefore, he must turn, if he would find the "Way." St Paul, whose writings he studied very

1. Confessions, Book VII, Sec.XX
2. Ibid, Sec.XXI
3. Ibid.

zealously, will show him the way.

More was necessary to bring Augustine to an appreciation of the Scriptures than simply certain books of Platonic philosophy that may have chanced to come to his attention. His aversion to the simple style in which the Scriptures were written and the discrepancies that he found in them, could not be removed very easily. His mother never lost her interest in him, but sought anxiously to bring him under such influences that would be most conducive to his spiritual development. In Ambrose, she found a very important agent in this regard.

INFLUENCE OF AMBROSE AND A NEW APPRECIATION OF THE SCRIPTURES

Augustine was attracted to Ambrose, the Bishop of Milan, because of his eloquence. As a teacher in rhetoric, Augustine naturally would be very much interested in men who were good speakers. As Augustine hears him speak, he is impressed by more than simply the eloquence, "For while I opened my heart to admit 'how eloquently he spake," there also entered 'how truly he spake,' but this by degrees."[1] It is in the latter respect that Ambrose was far superior to Faustus. For while Faustus was wandering amid the Manichaean delusions, Ambrose taught salvation in a very sound way.

1. Confessions, Book VII, Sec.XIII.

From Ambrose, Augustine learned the allegorical method of interpretation. With this method, the Old Testament, which heretofore had been a stumbling block to him, began to have a new meaning for him. Ambrose impresses upon his hearers that "the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life."[1] Augustine came regularly to hear Ambrose on Sunday, and was very much impressed by the presentation of the Scriptures. (Rightly expounding the Word of Truth among the people."[2]) Before hearing Ambrose, Augustine had come in contact with only a"meager pedantically literal and formless interpretation" of the Scriptures. Ambrose seemingly had that singular ability of making the Scriptures attractive to him. He is more and more convinced that the charges made against the Scriptures can be successfully refuted.

However, this experience with the Manichees makes him somewhat cautious, even in accepting this interpretation, although it appeals to him very greatly. Having once had a "bad physician" it is only natural that he would be rather hesitant to trust even a "good physician." Gradually, he realizes that the Catholic doctrine was unassuming and honest. Although he is not able then through abstract reasoning to find the truth, he is willing to take the position that the Scriptures were

1. Confessions, Book VI, Sec.IV
2. Ibid.

given for the purpose of helping man to find the truth. He believes that the Scriptures were imparted to mankind by the spirit of God, and that such authority would not have been given to them, if it were not that they should be believed in and used as a guide.[1] Under Ambrose's interpretation, the Scriptures which had formerly seemed to him absurd, had a deep meaning for him. He says:

> For now that things, sounding strangely in the Scripture, were wont to offend me, having heard divers of them expounded satisfactorily, I referred to the depth of the mysteries, and its authority appeared to me the more venerable, and more worthy of religious credence, in that, while it lay open to all to read, it reserved the majesty of its mysteries within its profounder meaning, stooping to all in the great plainness of its words and lowliness of its style, yet calling forth the intensest application of such as are not light of heart; that so it might receive all in its open bosom, and through narrow passages waft over thowards Thee some few, yet many more than if it stood not aloft on such a height of authority, nor drew multitudes within its bosom by its lowliness.[2]

Augustine was attracted to Ambrose, the man himself, and he became Augustine's ideal. "To him was I unknowing led by Thee, that by him I might knowingly be led to Thee."[3] Augustine loved him, and esteemed him very highly, so that everything that Ambrose said,

1. Confessions, Book VI, Sec.IV
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid, Book V, Sec.XIII.

was received with at least a favorable attitude. The very fact that Augustine sought interviews with the Bishop and was willing to wait his turn, and sometimes turn away rather than disturb the meditations when he saw Ambrose absorbed in a book, indicates that the youth had a very high regard for this man of God. His estimation of Ambrose increased, when he saw that the Bishop practiced celibacy. At that time, this was an ideal that seemingly was beyond Augustine, for he was still under the thraldom of sensuality. He says: "I thought I should be too miserable unless folded in female arms."[1] At the request of his mother, he sent away his mistress, the mother of Adeodatus, but it was not long until he had secured another. Yet the ideal of celibacy, as he saw it in Ambrose was not without its influence, even though Augustine was not then strong enough to adhere to this ideal.

Monnica realizes the tremendous influence that Ambrose had upon Augustine, and therefore she entreats him to have a conference with him. Ambrose, who himself went through the experiences as a Manichaean, felt that Augustine would need to think his way through the difficulties himself. Particularly because, at this time, Augustine was still somewhat egotistic and

1. Confessions, Book VII, Sec.XI

perhaps would not be disposed to take matters in the way Ambrose would have him take them. So he assures Monnica that God would grant her petition in the salvation of her son, and she takes this answer as a prophecy. In public meetings, Ambrose afforded Augustine a great deal of help. To Ambrose goes the credit for revealing the Scriptures in such a manner as would attract this young man and lead him to seek sincerely fot the truth and light. His life, too, was a source of inspiration for the young man who looked up to the Bishop of Milan and made him his ideal.

THE SCRIPTURES AS AN INSTRUMENT IN AUGUSTINE'S CONVERSION.

The writings of Augustine have many citations from the Scriptures and the Confessions show an abundance of passages from the Scriptures, but in our study we are interested only in those which bear directly upon his life before his conversion. With this in mind, it is necessary to omit the many references to the Psalms which we find in the Confessions, for it was not until later that he made a study of the Psalms.

THE PORTIONS WHICH AFFECTED HIM.

Augustine's attention is directed to the Gospel of Saint John, when he studied the books of Plato. He is surprised to find a remarkable likeness between the two. As this Gospel compares favorably in content to those books of Plato, which he delighted in reading, Augustine overlooked the simple style in which the fourth Gospel was written. As he progresses in his study, he realizes that the Scriptures contain not only the truths contained in these other writings, but that there are hidden meanings that he had failed to grasp in the Word; that there were depths which he had not sounded before. Moreover, in his comparison of the Scriptures with the writings of Plato, he finds that in content, the former surpasses the latter. Thus, while he reads not indeed

THE GOSPEL OF SAINT JOHN

in the very words, but to the same purpose --- the words: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.....", he also finds that he is not able to find in the writings of Plato, the words: "He came unto His own, and His own received Him Not..."[1] Neither can he find in those writings: "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us."

Augustine was inclined, at first, to doubt the Incarnation. The phrase, "The Word was made flesh," mystifies him. He could not imagine the import of that expression. In seeking a way of gaining the ability to "enjoy" God, Augustine seeks in vain until the grasps the idea of the

> Mediator between God and man, the Man Jesus Christ, who is over all, God blessed forevermore calling unto me, and saying, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life,' and mingling that food which I was unable to receive, with our flesh.[2]

It was in this respect that the Gospel of Saint John led him beyond the theory advanced by Plato.

Augustine conceived the idea of Christ as a man of excellent wisdom, one who surpassed all others, but he was not ready yet to grant wholly the place that the writer of the fourth Gospel would ascribe to Him. Therefore, he had not yet found the way of gaining this

1. Confessions, Book VII, Sec.IX. John 1:1, 1:14.
2. Ibid, Section XVIII, John 14:6.

"strength."[1] He realizes that if he would be consistent he would either have to believe the things that were said about Christ in the Gospels, or else doubt the other things which he believed. Thus he says:

> And should these things be falsely written of Him, all the rest also would risk the charge, nor would there remain in those books any saving faith for mankind. Since then they were written truly, I acknowledged a perfect man to be in Christ; not the body of a man only, nor, with the body, a sensitive soul without a rational, but a very man....[2]

In his study of the Gospel of John, Augustine was possibly impressed with the humility of the Christ which was presented, more than he was with the humble style in which this book was written. Having glimpsed a part of the truth, he was still "puffed up with knowledge," but the humility of the Carpenter of Nazareth showed to him the other ideal. Gradually, Augustine would learn that the proud are resisted and that grace is given to the humble.

Harnack states that Augustine's intense study of Paul began after he had broken with the Manichees and had been convinced by Neo-Platonism that God was a spiritual substance.[3] Augustine did make a thorough study of the writings of Saint Paul soon after he had broken with

THE WRITINGS OF PAUL

1. Confessions, Book VII, Sec.XIX.
2. Ibid.
3. Harnack, History of Dogma, Vol.V P.124

the Manichees, leaving the study of the Psalms until after his conversion.

After reading several of the Platonic books, Augustine is greatly attracted to the writings of Paul. "Most eagerly, then, did I seize the venerable writings of Thy Spirit; and chiefly the Apostle Paul."[1] In these writings, he found the truths that had been expressed in the writings of Plato, and more than these. For, in addition to some of the truths that he had found in those other books, he found here words concerning, "sacrifice, troubled spirit, broken and a contrite heart." "These things," said he, "did wonderfully sink into my bowels, when I read that least of Thy Apostles, and had meditated upon Thy works, and trembled exceedingly."[2]

He found that the seeming contradictions of the writings of Paul with the testimonies of the Law, and the Prophets disappear. Evidently he must have been reading the prophets and the books of the law. Yet when he is referred to the Book of Isaiah by Ambrose, he seems to be totally unfamiliar with it. He reads a part of it and then turns to the Psalms. This took place after his conversion, which would imply that he had had very little if any knowledge about these books before his conversion.

The writings of Paul have a great attraction

1. Confessions, Book VII, Sec.XXI.
2. Ibid.

for Augustine and they do give him light on matters that, up to this time, have been confusing and not a little distressing. Paul points out the warring factions in the life between the flesh and the spirit. How well Augustine realized this in his own life and yet did not know how to combat it. The Apostle deals directly with the sexual relations and gives helpful counsel. Augustine is not a little relieved to read that the Apostle does not forbid marriage and that he recognizes the tremendous struggle that some are obliged to fight in this sphere of life. Augustine is glad that, in extreme cases, Paul even suggests marriage.

Augustine is interested in Paul, the man. It was the man who had traveled on the road to Damascus, who would be able to point out the high road for him. It is he who asked and answered the question:

> What shall wretched man do? who shall deliver him from the body of this death, but only Thy Grace, through Jesus Christ our Lord.[1]

He, who himself had experienced a great change in his life, would doubtless be able to point out this way to another. Therefore, Paul, as his letters were carefully studied by Augustine, made a very important contribution to the conversion of this young man who was struggling to find the light. We must, however, consider other characters who also have a part in this great experience.

1. Romans: VII;24.

THE INFLUENCE OF SIMPLICANUS

Augustine, with all his theoretical grounding in the Scripture, has not yet come to the place where he was willing to make the decisive step and venture forward in the faith without reservations. It is one thing to know what is right and it is another thing to be able to do what is right. The way of the Saviour commended itself to Augustine, "but," said he, "as yet I shrunk from going through its straitness."[1] He rationalized taking refuge in the statement of Paul who, though he suggested the way of celibacy as the best way, did not condemn marriage and the relations of man and wife.

In his difficulties, Augustine seeks the counsel of Simplicanus who had helped Ambrose and who was renowned for the life that he was living. To Simplicanus, Augustine related his troubles. Simplicanus was very much interested in the account. He was delighted that Augustine read the Platonic books that were translated by Victorinus instead of the writings of some other philosophers whose books,according to Simplicanus, were full of deceits and fallacies.

Simplicanus readily sees Augustine's difficulties. He enjoins him to seek the humility of Christ and then, taking advantage of the point of contact that Augustine had with Victorinus, he tells him about the

1. Confessions, Book VIII, Sec. I

experiences of Victorinus. Augustine had read the translations that Victorinus made and so felt somewhat akin to this man, and thus he became all the more absorbed in the tale that followed.

This was the experience of Victorinus; a man who was skilled in the liberal sciences, who had read and weighed many works of the philosophers, a man who was in a comparative high place in society and honored in the eyes of many noble senators. He formerly had been a worshiper of idols as was the custom among many of the Roman nobility; yet this man, Victorinus, a man of eloquence, was converted by Simplicanus. Victorinus read the Holy Scriptures very studiously, and, on one occasion, came and told Simplicanus that he was already a Christian. Simplicanus answered:

> I will not believe it, nor will I rank you among Christians, unless I see you in the Church of Christ.[1]

Victorinus hesitated fearing to offend his friends, the proud daemon-worshipers. But, after reading and thinking for some time, he began to fear that later he might be denied by Christ before the holy angels should he now be afraid to confess Him before man. He makes the decision and, at the first opportunity, mounts the platform set up in the basilica for the profession of faith of the newly

[1]. Confessions, Book VIII, Sec. II.

converted and there, like the meanest of the faithful, made his profession before the people. The effect of this profession was very great upon those assembled there. The people shouted with one accord: "Victorinus, Victorinus."

The tale was told very vividly by Simplicanus and Augustine "drank in" every word. He saw himself upon the platform making a noble confession amid the plaudits of the multitude and it gave him quite a thrill as he thought about it. In the momentary ecstacy, he asks himself the question:

> Good God! what takes place in man, that he should more rejoice at the salvation of a soul despaired of, and freed from greater peril, than if there had always been hope of him or the danger had been less?[1]

Why should there be more rejoicing over the one sheep that was found than the ninety and nine that were safe in the fold? He makes the observation that the greater joy is ushered in by the greater pain. He recognizes that there were others who found the peace that Victorinus found, who were farther estranged from God and the question comes to him, "Why not I?" As he thinks, he recalls the experience that the Apostle Paul had. Here, then, were two who had passed from darkness into light.

Augustine was inflamed with the desire to

1. Confessions, Book VIII, Sec. II.

imitate Victorinus. Simplicanus sees that the tale was not without its effect. He adds that Victorinus, because of his decision, was thereafter not allowed to teach the liberal sciences or oratory. Augustine respects Victorinus, none the less, for having made this sacrifice and the example of his courage and determination made a profound impress upon his mind and heart. A new will was born in Augustine; it was a will to serve God wholly but this will was not yet strong enough to overcome the habits that had become so strong throughout these years, habits that held him chained to the lust of his pleasure. On the one hand was his thraldom to carnal concupiscence which is estimated to be one of the greatest evils against which he had to struggle; while on the other hand was the desire to follow this higher will.

The experience of Victorinus, as it was related to Augustine by Simplicanus, brought matters toward a new crisis, yet this influence was not strong enough in Augustine to enable him to make the decisive step. Simplicanus certainly did use the right psychology in approaching Augustine's difficulty in this matter. He portrayed the Scripture in life, for, in his tale, the Word was kindled and quickened through the living influence of personality.

Pontitianus, an African in high office in the Emperor's court, chances to visit Augustine one day. Alypius, Augustine's friend, was also present. Why this man should have come, we are not told. Augustine himself seems to be ignorant of the purpose of the visit. Pontitianus noticed a book on the table and was surprised to find it to be a copy of the Epistles of Paul. Being a Christian, Pontitianus is delighted to find this book and thereafter the conversation turns to the Christian life.

THE EFFECT OF THE TALE OF PONTITIANUS

Pontitianus refers to Anthony an Egyptian monk who was well known among the people. He is surprised to learn that this famous character is not known to Augustine and Alypius. Since they do not know about Anthony, Pontitianus dwells more at length upon the life of this man who evidently was a great favorite of Pontitianus. Anthony was a man who had a very scanty knowledge of letters. He was able to learn the Scriptures mainly through hearing them read and then reflecting upon them. The three talked about monasteries and the life of the people who lived there. It is rather strange that Augustine should be ignorant concerning this and yet the following would indicate that he was:

> Thence his discourse turned to the flock in the Monasteries and their holy ways, a sweet smelling savour unto Thee, and the fruitful deserts of the wilderness whereof we knew nothing.[1]

Even the monasteries at Milan, under the care of Ambrose, were practically unknown to these two.

Thereafter Pontitianus related the story of the courtiers at Triers who went out for a walk one afternoon while the Emperor was at the Circensian games. Two of the four wandered into a certain cottage inhabited by hermits. There they found a book containing the life of Anthony. One of them read the book and became very much absorbed in it. Suddenly this one turns to his friend and asks the question:

> Tell me, I pray thee, what would we attain by all these labors of ours? what aim we at? what serve we for? can our hopes in court rise higher than to be the Emperor's favourites?[2]

He continued:

> And when arrive we thither? But a friend of God, if I wish it, I become at once.[3]

He turned to the book and continued reading during which time a great change was taking place in his heart and then finally exclaims:

> Now, have I broken loose from those hopes and am resolved to serve God;

1. Confessions, Book VIII, Sec. V.
2. Ibid. Book VIII, Sec. VI.

> and this from this hour, in this place, I begin upon. If thou likest not to imitate me, oppose me not.[1]

The other friend decided immediately to cast his lot with his comrade so that when Pontitianus and the other courtier returned, they found that these two had made their decision to follow the example of Anthony and would not be prevailed upon to change. The new converts remained in the cottage while Pontitianus and the other friend returned to the palace. Both of the converts had affianced brides and these, when they heard of the decision of their friends, decided that they also would dedicate their lives to God and live in celibacy. Having concluded the tale, Pontitianus left Augustine and Alypius soon thereafter. His work was done.

The vividness with which Augustine describes or re-tells the story that was told to him, indicates to some extent the effect that it must have had upon him. After hearing the tale of Pontitianus, Augustine has in his mind the decision of these four people who followed the example of an unlettered man Anthony, and consecrated their lives to the Master. The psychological influence which is so prevalent at the spiritual revival meetings, was at work in the life of Augustine. How contagious is the spirit, when persons are converted

1. Confessions, Book VIII, Sec. VI.

under a great emotional excitement! It is all the more powerful, as an influence, when the preliminary work has been done and the persons are brought up to the great crisis. Evangelists have made it a study and have found effective methods to induce favorable moods in the minds of the prospective converts. Music and hymns, vivid accounts of persons who have found a great peace and joy, all that would tend to lead them to a decision, are used with a definite purpose and aim.

In the case of Augustine, the preliminary work was done. He realized his failings and felt most poignantly the inroads that sin was making upon his life. Through his struggle for light and truth in the dark "forest" of Manichaeism, he finally came to the conclusion that in the Scriptures this light was to be found. In the study of the Scriptures, he came in contact with the remarkable experience of Paul.

Added to this was the cumulative influence of the experiences of Victorinus, Anthony, the two courtiers and their friends. This influence is brought to bear upon Augustine at the right psychological moments. He had a period of time for reflection after he heard the remarkable experience of Victorinus but, before that vivid impression of the conversion could fade, Augustine hears about the wonderful influence that Anthony, an uneducated

man, through his consecration had upon four others. These different influences are centered upon one point and Augustine feels the concentrated effect as he struggles against the force that held him down so long. It is a battle royal. The tale of Pontitianus gave to Augustine spiritual strength. It was as though his will were re-enforced. Until this time, the lower tendencies in his nature had had the ascendancy. In his spiritual struggle, after hearing Victorinus' experience, he was fighting a losing fight. The enemy was too strong for him. His prayer for chastity and continency was limited by the interjection, "only not yet."

> For I feared lest Thou shouldest hear me too soon and soon cure me of the disease of concupiscence, which I wished to have satisfied, rather than extinguished.[1]

The pleasures of his life came up before him:

> Dost thou cast us off? and from that moment shall we no more be with thee forever?

He said:

> Yet they did retard me, so that I hesitated to burst and shake myself free from them, and to spring over whither I was called; a violent habit saying to me, 'Thinkest thou, thou canst live without them?'[2]

Yet here were these courtiers who were so affected by the story of Anthony that their lives from that time

1. Confessions, Book VIII, Sec. VII.
2. Confessions, Book VII, Sec. XI.

onward were changed. They voluntarily closed the doors to the pleasures of married life as did also their friends that they might, more intensely, serve their Lord and Master. Augustine's own heart condemned him:

> With what scourges of condemnation lashed I not my soul, that it might follow me, striving to go after Thee! Yet it drew back; refused, but excused not itself.[1]

In his desperation he turns almost fiercely upon Alypius; saying

> What ails us?.....The unlearned start up and take heaven by force, and we, with our learning and without heart, lo, where we wallow in flesh and blood! Are we ashamed to follow, because others are gone before, and not ashamed not even to follow?[2]

In this great tumultuous feeling of shame and unworthiness, Augustine hurries out into the garden, followed by Alypius. What transpired there we may not realize in its entirety. Only he who has gone through such a struggle of mind and heart is able to appreciate what anguish is entailed in the trial that Augustine experienced. Even the agony of Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane may seem somewhat superficial to some, nevertheless, in no battlefield was a spirit under greater strain and struggle. In Augustine all the evil influences that played a part in his life in Thagaste, Madaura,

1. Confessions, Book VII, Sec. VII.
2. Confessions, Book VII, Sec. VIII.

Carthage, Rome, and Milan; these were in "battle array." On the side were the influences that were inciting him to make the decision that these men, mentioned above, had made.

CRUCIAL MOMENT -- HIS CONVERSION

In moments like those that Augustine was experiencing in the Garden sometimes passages of Scriptures come to mind that clear the way to a decision and, like rays of sun bursting through the clouds, they bring hope and cheer to the discouraged and down-cast spirit. Could we have witnessed the battle that ensued in the life of Augustine, we might have been in considerable trepidation as to the outcome of the struggle. He describes this struggle as follows:

> Myself when I was deliberating upon serving the Lord my God now, as I had long purposed, it was I who willed, I who nilled, I myself. I neither willed entirely, nor nilled entirely. Therefore was I at strife with myself, and rent asunder by myself.[1]

The tumult in his heart grew rather than diminished and he leaves Alypius as he goes away where he, alone, may give way to his consuming emotions. He casts himself upon the ground and sends up the words: "How long? Why not now? Why not is there this hour an end to my uncleanness?"[2] At this point he hears a voice, presumably of

1. Confessions, Book VIII, Sec. X.
2. Confessions, Book VIII, Sec. XII.

a boy or a girl in the neighboring house, chanting "Take up and read; take up and read."[1]

Augustine interprets this no other than that it was a command from God. His painful period of indecision is over and he immediately follows the suggestion as though it were a command from God to open the book and read the first chapter he should find. He remembered that it was told him how Anthony had received such an admonition as if what was being read was meant directly for him, namely:

> Go, and sell all that thou hast and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven, and come and follow me.[2]

Augustine quickly comes to where Alypius was sitting and there picks up the book of the Apostle Paul. He opens the book and reads from Romans 13:14:

> Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying: but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof.[3]

Had these words been written in the sky or had they been hurled through a loud speaker in thunderous and commanding tones, they scarcely would have had more authority for Augustine, than they did as he read them that day.

1. Confessions, Book VIII, Sec. XII.
2. Matthew, Chap. XIX, 21.
3. Confessions, Book VIII, Sec. XII.

To him it was as though the finger of God had pointed the way that he should go and the voice of God saying kindly, but very firmly, "Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ."[1]

At this period, the Scriptures were to him as the voice of God. How far removed was he from the attitude that he had while he was a Manichaean! From darkness, he had come into the light and, with the light and knowledge, came the command to put away the works of darkness and to put on the "Armor of light." His infirm will was supplemented by the will that to him was the "Will" of God as it was expressed through the Scriptures, particularly through the writings of Paul. Augustine read no further at that time:

> For instantly at the end of this sentence, by a light as it were of serenity infused into my heart, all the darkness of doubt vanished away.[2]

His assurance that this method of reading the Scriptures was valid was increased by the experience of his friend Alypius who took the passage that had made such a profound impression upon Augustine and read further: "Him that is weak in the faith, receive ye." Alypius applies this to himself and by this admonition was greatly strengthened. He also made the decision to put on the

1. Confessions, Book VIII, Sec. XII.

Lord Jesus Christ and joined Augustine in the stand that he had taken. The two are over-joyed with their experiences and they go to tell Monnica.

Expressing rather crudely the influence of Romans 13:14, it might be compared to the light that set off the charge of spiritual dynamite which broke the shackles of sin and sent forth into the world a character that was permeated with the spirit of Christ.

WITHDRAWAL FROM SECULAR PURSUITS

Augustine withdraws gradually from his secular pursuits. From one having such an outstanding experience as Augustine, we would expect to find radical changes in the life that followed. Great changes did take place but for the most part these changes as they affected his normal thought life took place gradually. He portrays this change in the following:

> And I resolved in Thy sight, not tumultuously to tear, but gently to withdraw, the service of my tongue from the marts of lip-labour; that the young, no students in Thy law, nor in Thy peace, but in lying dotages and law-skirmishes, should no longer buy at my mouth arms for their madness. And very seasonably it now wanted but very few days unto the vacation of the regular way to take my leave, and having been purchased by Thee, no more to return for sale.1

1. Confessions, Book IX, Sec. II.

How different was Paul who abruptly changed his course; so radical indeed was the change that the adherents of the faith which he would espouse were in some trepidation about receiving him among their number. Augustine did not experience this difficulty for it is only reasonable to suppose that great and immediate changes would result from the experiences which he had had.

The question is raised by Dr. Cell[1], and justly so, that, if the Scriptures were the main psychological factor in the character formation, conversion, and final concentration of will energy in the monastic mode of life in Augustine, why should his early writings (387-391) be Neo-Platonic in character?

NEO-PLATONISM GIVES WAY TO CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY

In the first place, Neo-Platonism was not "anti-Scriptural." On the contrary, the books which Augustine read served to direct his attention to the Scriptures. Indeed, they were a great influence to this end. Neo-Platonism had a profound influence upon Augustine, and it is only natural that this influence would persist for a time at least even after his conversion. It would take a longer period of time to develop intellectual credence for the theories advanced in the Scriptures than it would merely to make a life's decision which involved

1. Cell, George Croft, Class Notes 1929

an action that he knew to be right. "Thou didst rescue my tongue," said he, "whence Thou hadst before rescued my heart."[1]

Schaff says:

> The philosopher in him afterwards yielded more and more to the theologian.....Before his conversion, he followed a particular system of philosophy, first Manichaean, then Platonic; after his conversion he embraced the Christian philosophy, which is based on the divine revelation of the Scriptures, and is the handmaid of theology and religion.[2]

Neo-Platonism helped to clear the way for Augustine to an appreciation of the Scriptures. In a sense, it had the same relation to the Scriptures that John the Baptist had to Christ; namely, it directed his attention to the place where he might find "the light." Neo-Platonism appealed to his reason but it failed to reach the heart.

In the second place, the purpose which Augustine had in mind was undoubtedly that of directing the attention of others who were in the same dilemma that he had been to the Scriptures. I believe that the character of these writings will disclose the purpose which Augustine had in mind. Schaff[2] lists them as follows:

(a) Contra Academicos Librites (386)
This book combats the skepticism and probabilism of the new academy.

1 Confessions, Book IX, Sec. IV
2 Schaff, History of the Christian Church, Vol. III, pp 1009-1010

(b) De Vita Beata (386)
"Blessedness consists in perfect knowledge of God."
(c) De Ordine (386)
On the relation of evil to the divine order of the world.
(d) Soliloquia (387)
Communings with his own soul concerning God, the highest good, the knowledge of truth and immortality.
(e) De Immortalitate Animae (389)
Continuations of the Soliloquia.
(f) De Quantitate Animae (387)
Sundry questions of the size, origin, the incorporeality of the soul.
(g) De Magistro (389)
The importance and virtue of the Word of God, and on Christ as the infallible Master.

Schaff claims that these writings were designed to present the different stages of human thought by which Augustine himself had reached the knowledge of the truth, and to serve others as steps to the sanctuary.[1]

It would take time and thought to make the transition from Neo-Platonism to Christian theology.

AUGUSTINE'S THOUGHT-LIFE FINDS EXPRESSION IN THE PSALMS

After his conversion, Augustine writes Ambrose asking him for suggestions in regard to the Scriptures which he should read. Ambrose refers him to Isaiah, but Augustine turns to the Psalms in preference and makes a thorough study of them. The Psalms are peculiarly adapted to give expression to a person's

1. Schaff, History of the Christian Church, Vol.III P.1009

thought as they seem to have a universal outlook; but they were particularly adapted to give expression to the thoughts of Augustine.

> Oh in what accents spake I unto Thee,
> My God, when I read the Psalms of
> David, those faithful songs.[1]

But it is to be remembered that these Psalms were read after his conversion and therefore should not be included in this present study even though he quotes very frequently from this portion of the Scriptures in the Confessions and other writings. Thus, even though the forty-third Psalm was sung at his baptism and in later years he read them frequently, there is little direct reference to the Psalms which would lead one to think that he spent much time studying them before his conversion.

1. Confessions, Book IX, Sec. IV

SUMMARY

In this treatment, is is seen that the Scriptures play a predominant part in the life of Augustine. Their influence is not always apparent, yet there is, as Professor Marlatt has so ably stated:

> A God-subconsciousness here which needed only a suggestion to catapult it into the foreground of Consciousness.[1]

Augustine may have been ignorant of much of the Scriptures before he is interested in the writings of Paul but the germinal Truths were given to him even in his early life. The name "Christ" was familiar to him, and Monnica made certain that Augustine would have a thorough religious foundation.

Through the mazes of a sensual life at Thagaste, Madaura, and Carthage; through the presumptuous teachings of the Manichees that darkened his spiritual vision, the Scriptures shine like the sun sometimes obscured from sight by the clouds only to emerge again with increased radiancy when the doubts have been dispelled. If it is true that the Truth is made stronger when contrasted with error, then Augustine's nine years among the Manichees served to give him a higher appreciation of the Scriptures when their Truth was eventually established in his mind.

1. Marlatt, Earl. Protestant Saints, P. 12

Among the many influences that played a part in the life of Augustine it is rather difficult to ascribe a very definite place for the Scriptures. As he emerges from the error of Manichaeism and gradually gains a glimpse of the truth, Augustine is influenced in the main through personality. The objection may be raised that, were it not for the influence of Ambrose, Simplicanus, Victorinus, Pontitianus, Anthony, and the two courtiers of Triers, there would not have been a conversion. It is difficult to draw a sharp distinction between the direct influence of the Scriptures and the influence that personality had upon him.

The question arises, also, what distinction should be made between the story of Paul's Conversion and Anthony's conversion? The one is canonical because it is included in the Scriptures while the other is simply a tale from contemporary life; yet the two greatly impressed Augustine and had an influence upon him when he read and heard about them.

When we simply talk about the direct influence that the Scriptures had upon Augustine as they were expounded to him in private or in public or as he studied them, the tale is only half told. What influence did the Scriptures have upon Ambrose, for example;

upon Simplicanus, upon Victorinus, and finally upon his mother and upon other personalities that helped to turn Augustine's attention to the truth? Shall we place the direct influence of the Scriptures in juxtaposition to the influences that these other characters had upon him and say that this was the part that the Scriptures played in Augustine's conversion, while this was the way these persons affected Augustine? The influences in life are so complex, so inter-connected, that such a sharp distinction cannot be drawn.

The lives of these people were shot through with the power of the truth that they found in the Scriptures and, therefore, as their personalities made their impress upon the life of Augustine, the Scriptures again found expression through the crucible of personality.

As Ambrose interpreted the Scriptures to Augustine, there is a two-fold influence of the Scriptures. First, we have the influence that the Scriptures had upon Ambrose personally, enabling him to battle his way through the darkness of the Manichaean error (this is the subjective aspect as far as Ambrose was concerned); in the second place, we have the Scriptures used as an instrument in the voice and gesture of the bishop or

the direct influence which is felt by Augustine as he listens to the sermon.

It is one thing when I am impressed with the Scriptures to such an extent that my life is changed and that I am enabled to turn from the habits that chained me down in the past; it is another thing when I, as a servant of God, am using the Scriptures as an instrument to bring others to a knowledge of God. Yet, in both cases, the Scriptures are exerting the influence upon the person in question.

With this in mind, I believe that we are justified in classifying the influence of Ambrose and the others whose lives have been affected with the Scriptures with the influence of the "Word," in the conversion of Augustine. What is a consecrated personality but the handwriting of God in a human life, a living expression of the Word of God, the Word made flesh! Therefore, in tracing the influence of these various factors in the conversion of Augustine, I have merely traced the influence of the Word of God and endeavored to ascribe a place for the Scriptures in his conversion.

There is another factor which enters the scene, the human will; the will that made it so hard

for Augustine to make the great decision; the will that made it necessary for him to go through the 'travails of the flesh'; the will that, for a time, would obstruct the passage of the Word of God. Eventually the opposition is removed and then the yearning of the human soul found peace and an increasing satisfaction as it became a channel through which the Word might be brought to others.

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